

## Ben Elias

## NRL

Benjamin Elias (born 15 November 1963, Tripoli, Lebanon) is an Australian former rugby league footballer of the 1980s and 90s. He played primarily as a hooker for Balmain in the New South Wales Rugby League premiership. He was one of the leading hookers from the mid 1980s until his retirement at the end of the 1994 season. Along with Wayne Pearce, Paul Sironen and Steve Roach, Elias and his Balmain teammates formed one of the best forward packs in the modern era during the late 1980s.

Benny Elias was responsible for the reinvention of the hooker's role in rugby league: helping to change it from that of a scrummager to a skilful playmaker at "dummy half". He has sometimes been spoken of as "a player with a halfback's talents playing at hooker", yet Elias was still a superb scrummager, as shown when he won three key scrums against the feed in a 1990 play-off against Newcastle.

While attending Holy Cross College, Ryde, Elias played for the Australian Schoolboys team in 1979 and 1981.

In 1985 he played in New South Wales' first team to win a State of Origin series, and was selected for the New Zealand tour that year. Elias was subsequently selected for the following year's Kangaroo Tour, which was undefeated through England and France; however Elias was unable to displace Royce Simmons as the Test hooker.

Elias was instrumental in Balmain's advancement to the NSWRL Grand Final against the Canterbury Bulldogs in 1988, despite experiencing a painful rib cartilage injury during the lead-up to the finals series. Though they lost 12-24 to Canterbury, Elias won the *Rugby League Week* Player of the Year award (one of only two hookers to achieve this feat). He was selected for the 1988 World Cup, and only a broken thumb kept him out of representative honours in 1989. He was back at his best in Balmain's surge to the Grand Final that year, narrowly missing a vital field-goal attempt in the second half of the overtime loss to the Canberra Raiders, a game in which Steve Walters began to assert his dominance as the leading postwar Rugby League Hooker.



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Elias made 19 appearances for the New South Wales State of Origin team between 1985 and 1994 and was named man-of-the-match on 3 occasions (Game I 1990, Game I 1992 and Game III 1994). Elias played State of Origin with incredible passion and is remembered for his fiery clashes with Queensland hookers Kerrod and Steve Walters. He was honoured later in his career when he captained the Blues in six games in 1990 - 1991.

An enduring image of State of Origin remains from 1990 when with blood streaming down his face he helped NSW to a 8-0 win in Melbourne to claim their first Series win in 4 years.

In 2005 he was named one of the 25 greatest ever NSW players.

Benny is currently on the Wests Tigers board with former team mate Paul Sironen.